

April 9,
2019

Anders Lasater's goal as an award-winning architect is to create 'better spaces for people to lead better lives'



By Eve Gumpel, California Business Journal.

For Anders Lasater, great architecture requires a proper balance of four fundamental ingredients: space, proportion, light, and material—in that order.

"You have to start with space," says Lasater, CEO and principal architect of Anders Lasater Architects, Inc. in Laguna Beach, Calif. "That means understanding the space you need and the space you have to work with."

Next you temper that space through proportion. "Space itself is limitless," he says. "But when you have proportion, you can begin to temper and modify that space into relationship with the human body."

That's key, he says. "Architecture is meant for us—for humans—and there must be a human quality in its proportions that can be understood."

Consider the soaring interior of the great gothic cathedrals of Europe. The exaggerated proportions "help create a relationship to the divine," Lasater says. "The human body becomes insignificant."

Contrast that with a bedroom or a bathroom. "The proportion there," he says, "must be different than when you're worshipping in a cathedral. Space and proportion are the context in which we understand our place in the built environment."

Light comes next. "Light is the only way we're able to see space or proportion. And if we don't manage light and bring light in thoughtfully, we won't understand the hard work that has been done with space and proportion."

He pauses before issuing this warning: "You can't just put light everywhere. It has to be used in combination with shadow. If you don't have shadow, you don't have light."



In Orange County, Calif., an abundance of light is derived from the south. The architect's job is to balance the abundance of southern light from the coast, where big windows display the ocean view, with the tempered light that comes from the northern side.

"Understanding that you need to balance light, limit light, and invite light to the party in a thoughtful way is what makes for a successful experience for the human being," Lasater explains.

Clerestory windows are those that are above a lower roof element but below the highest roof element; they take the harsh, direct sunlight, bounce it around, and filter it into a living space. "That's the kind of light that is most appealing to our subconscious," Lasater says.



Another lighting trick Lasater employs is creating darkness and inviting light in where he wants you to see it. Often that is at the end of a hallway. “You want to go down that hallway, you want to investigate that light, and find its source.”

He adds: “The sense of exploring in architecture by crafting where I put light and where I don’t put light is an important and powerful tool.”

The last of the four ingredients is materials. Lasater doesn’t push expensive materials on his clients. “I can design a beautiful home out of white drywall and stucco and nothing else. You can’t expect good materials to make a good house. It’s much more than that. Material gets invited to the party once space, proportion, and light have been put into balance.”

Lasater knew at age 10 that he wanted to either be a musician or an architect. “I fell in love with this notion of creation, both musically and then in the physical built world as young as 10 when I started doing some work in our school woodshop, creating drawings of something that you could go build on a machine. I found that very alluring—that idea of creating something from nothing was very seductive.”

He chose architecture, reasoning he’d have a higher probability of making a living. However, he says, “music is still very central to what I do.” He plays in a band, and he and his two sons have a family band as well. “So music has become a way to have immediate access to creation and my architecture has become a way to make a living. But I love what I do for a living because I get to create things for people who didn’t even know that they could have something as wonderful as what I’ll create for them.”



He describes architecture as “an old man’s game.” Not only does it take a long time to become a superior architect, projects take time to blossom and gestate. Like making a baby, there’s a conception, a gestation, and then birth. “In the end you’ve given birth to this beautiful thing, but it takes a long time to create meaningful architecture—like it takes a long time to make a baby.”

Lasater’s designs reflect his clients’ lifestyle. “I often hear from my clients comments like ‘he wakes me up with the light in bathroom.’” To counter that, Lasater’s firm designs bedrooms that give individuals the ability to disappear behind walls. Conversely, Lasater often opens up a house by borrowing views and space from adjacent rooms.

The goal of architecture, of course, is a happy client. “Nine times out of 10, clients come to me and are very clear about what they want—but what they want and what they need are two very different things,” he says.

Lasater’s challenge is to help his clients see what it is they really need and find the solutions that would be most appropriate for them given those needs. For example, Lasater recently completed a design for a family home in a wooded property outside Chicago. The client asked Lasater to duplicate one of his Dana Point, Calif. beachfront homes.

“I said, ‘that doesn’t make any sense.’ A house designed for the beach isn’t going to look like a house designed for a wooded site in Chicago. What my client really wanted was a Chicago house that had the same kind of internal DNA—that had the same architectural makeup that creates meaningful spaces that he could fall in love with.”

The end result is far removed and completely different from the house in Dana Point, “yet it’s so much the same house in its quality of space, light, and the experiences he will have in that house.”

Once the client saw Lasater’s design, his desires and wants changed. “That is always a great moment for me—when you can help the owner see beyond their preconceived ideas and understand that they can have something far beyond what they could ever have imagined.”

The resulting design, “the House by the Woods” as Lasater calls it, “is a dialogue between the trees surrounding the house and the openings in the house that offer the client a relationship to the outdoor experience through the lens of the house. It’s allowed to have a variety of peek-a-boo views out to that wooded area because the woods surround it. It’s not just on one side like the ocean of the Dana Point house.” The design won the 2018 American Institute of Architects, Orange County Chapter Design Award.



“From my perspective, the most important thing we do is create better spaces for people to occupy and lead better lives through these spaces,” Lasater says. “We deserve great architectural design—and people should expect it. And the more we can help people know what good architecture is, the more they’re going to expect it and the more they’re going to want it.”

Technology has made it easier for Lasater and his colleagues. "It's difficult to take a building and put it on paper and have anybody understand it. That's because visualizing a building in three-dimensional space is difficult—it takes years to master," he says. "So now we can create 3-D environments that you can actually walk through and participate in."

"When my client sees that, it suddenly goes from, 'I'm not sure I get it' to 'Oh my, now I see.' It becomes a game changer about how the client understands what I'm doing. Across the spectrum of the work we've done, the one unifying idea is that all of these buildings—whether it's a home, a clothing retailer, an art gallery, or a restaurant—are places where we can have intimate experiences with people and with the building itself—and that the building will become a vehicle for making your life better."

Among Lasater's favorite buildings is The Jonas Salk Institute in La Jolla, designed by Louis Kahn. "It's a beautiful and pure expression of poured concrete and wood brought together in a very reverential way. It's one of the most spiritually beautiful buildings I've ever seen. And it's not a spiritual place at all. It's a place where scientists work. Louis Kahn realized the best way to give a scientist a place to work is to create something that moves the soul."

One of Lasater's favorites that he personally designed is the Peter Blake Gallery in Laguna Beach. "It's white stucco and white drywall. There are no special materials, no fancy tricks, nothing you can point to that makes it a great building." Instead, "it is a collection of thoughtfully proportioned spaces, carefully arranged; windows and skylights; and volumes that create intimate opportunities to be with the art that Peter displays."

Copyright © 2019 California Business Journal. All Rights Reserved.

Brilliance in Architecture

For Anders Lasater, great architecture requires a proper balance of four fundamental ingredients: space, proportion, light, and material—in that order.

"You have to start with space," says Lasater, CEO and principal architect of Anders Lasater Architects, Inc. in Laguna Beach, Calif. "That means understanding the space you need and the space you have to work with."

Next you temper that space through proportion. "Space itself is limitless," he says. "But when you have proportion, you can begin to temper and modify that space into relationship with the human body."

That's key, he says. "Architecture is meant for us—for humans—and there must be a human quality in its proportions that can be understood."

Consider the soaring interior of the great gothic cathedrals of Europe. The exaggerated proportions "help create a relationship to the divine," Lasater says. "The human body becomes insignificant."

Contrast that with a bedroom or a bathroom. "The proportion there," he says, "must be different than when you're worshipping in a cathedral. Space and proportion are the context in which we under-



*Anders Lasater, CEO and
principal architect of
Anders Lasater Architects*

Photo credit: Chad Mellon

Anders Lasater's goal as an award-winning architect is to create 'better spaces for people to lead better lives'

stand our place in the built environment."

Light comes next. "Light is the only way we're able to see space or proportion. And if we don't manage light and bring light in thoughtfully, we won't understand the hard work that has been done with space and proportion."

He pauses before issuing this warning: "You can't just put light everywhere. It has to be used in combination with shadow. If you don't have shadow, you don't have light."

In Orange County, Calif., an abundance of light is derived from the south. The architect's job is to balance the abundance of southern light from the coast, where big windows display the ocean view, with the tempered light that comes from the northern side.

"Understanding that you need to balance light, limit light, and invite light to the party in a thoughtful way is what makes for a successful experience for the human being," Lasater explains.

Clerestory windows are those that are above a

Architecture and Design

lower roof element but below the highest roof element; they take the harsh, direct sunlight, bounce it around, and filter it into a living space. "That's the kind of light that is most appealing to our subconscious," Lasater says.

Another lighting trick Lasater employs is creating darkness and inviting light in where he wants you to see it. Often that is at the end of a hallway. "You want to go down that hallway, you want to investigate that light, and find its source."

He adds: "The sense of exploring in architecture by crafting where I put light and where I don't put light is an important and powerful tool."

The last of the four ingredients is materials. Lasater doesn't push expensive materials on his clients. "I can design a beautiful home out of white drywall and stucco and nothing else. You can't expect good materials to make a good house. It's much more than that. Material gets invited to the party once space, proportion, and light have been put into balance."



Lasater knew at age 10 that he wanted to either be a musician or an architect. "I fell in love with this notion of creation, both musically and then in the physical built world as young as 10 when I started doing some work in our school woodshop, creating drawings of something that you could go build on a machine. I found that very alluring—that idea of creating something from nothing was very seductive."

He chose architecture, reasoning he'd have a higher probability of making a living. However, he says, "music is still very central to what I do." He plays in a band, and he and his two sons have a family band as well. "So music has become a way to have immediate access to creation and my archi-



tecture has become a way to make a living. But I love what I do for a living because I get to create things for people who didn't even know that they could have something as wonderful as what I'll create for them."

He describes architecture as "an old man's game." Not only does it take a long time to become a superior architect, projects take time to blossom and gestate. Like making a baby, there's a conception, a gestation, and then birth. "In the end you've given birth to this beautiful thing, but it takes a long time to create meaningful architecture—like it takes a long time to make a baby."

Lasater's designs reflect his clients' lifestyle. "I often hear from my clients comments like 'he wakes me up with the light in bathroom.'" To counter that, Lasater's firm designs bedrooms that give individuals the ability to disappear behind walls. Conversely, Lasater often opens up a house by borrowing views and space from adjacent rooms.

The goal of architecture, of course, is a happy client. "Nine times out of 10, clients come to me and are very clear about what they want—but what they want and what they need are two very different things," he says.

Lasater's challenge is to help his clients see what it is they really need and find the solutions that would be most appropriate for them given those needs. For example, Lasater recently completed a design for a family home in a wooded property outside Chicago. The client asked Lasater to duplicate one of his Dana Point, Calif. beachfront homes.

"I said, 'that doesn't make any sense.' A house designed for the beach isn't going to look like a house designed for a wooded site in Chicago. What my client really wanted was a Chicago house

Architecture and Design

that had the same kind of internal DNA—that had the same architectural makeup that creates meaningful spaces that he could fall in love with.”

The end result is far removed and completely different from the house in Dana Point, “yet it’s so much the same house in its quality of space, light, and the experiences he will have in that house.”

Once the client saw Lasater’s design, his desires and wants changed. “That is always a great moment for me—when you can help the owner see beyond their preconceived ideas and understand that they can have something far beyond what they could ever have imagined.”

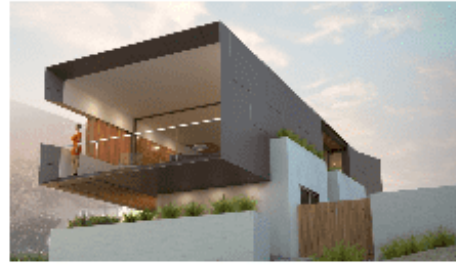
The resulting design, “the House by the Woods” as Lasater calls it, “is a dialogue between the trees surrounding the house and the openings in the house that offer the client a relationship to the outdoor experience through the lens of the house. It’s allowed to have a variety of peek-a-boo views out to that wooded area because the woods surround it. It’s not just on one side like the ocean of the Dana Point house.” The design won the 2018 American Institute of Architects, Orange County Chapter Design Award.

“From my perspective, the most important thing we do is create better spaces for people to occupy



and lead better lives through these spaces,” Lasater says. “We deserve great architectural design—and people should expect it. And the more we can help people know what good architecture is, the more they’re going to expect it and the more they’re going to want it.”

Technology has made it easier for Lasater and his colleagues. “It’s difficult to take a building and put it on paper and have anybody understand it. That’s because



visualizing a building in three-dimensional space is difficult—it takes years to master,” he says. “So now we can create 3-D environments that you can actually walk through and participate in.

“When my client sees that, it suddenly goes from, ‘I’m not sure I get it’ to ‘Oh my, now I see.’ It becomes a game changer about how the client understands what I’m doing. Across the spectrum of the work we’ve done, the one unifying idea is that all of these buildings—whether it’s a home, a clothing retailer, an art gallery, or a restaurant—are places where we can have intimate experiences with people and with the building itself—and that the building will become a vehicle for making your life better.”

Among Lasater’s favorite buildings is The Jonas Salk Institute in La Jolla, designed by Louis Kahn.

“It’s a beautiful and pure expression of poured concrete and wood brought together in a very reverential way. It’s one of the most spiritually beautiful buildings I’ve ever seen. And it’s not a spiritual place at all. It’s a place where scientists work. Louis Kahn realized the best way to give a scientist a place to work is to create something that moves the soul.”

One of Lasater’s favorites that he personally designed is the Peter Blake Gallery in Laguna Beach. “It’s white stucco and white drywall. There are no special materials, no fancy tricks, nothing you can point to that makes it a great building.”

Instead, “it is a collection of thoughtfully proportioned spaces, carefully arranged; windows and skylights; and volumes that create intimate opportunities to be with the art that Peter displays.” —
By Eve Gumpel, California Business Journal

Copyright © 2019 California Business Journal. All Rights Reserved.

Architecture and Design

that had the same kind of internal DNA—that had the same architectural makeup that creates meaningful spaces that he could fall in love with.”

The end result is far removed and completely different from the house in Dana Point, “yet it’s so much the same house in its quality of space, light, and the experiences he will have in that house.”

Once the client saw Lasater’s design, his desires and wants changed. “That is always a great moment for me—when you can help the owner see beyond their preconceived ideas and understand that they can have something far beyond what they could ever have imagined.”

The resulting design, “the House by the Woods” as Lasater calls it, “is a dialogue between the trees surrounding the house and the openings in the house that offer the client a relationship to the outdoor experience through the lens of the house. It’s allowed to have a variety of peek-a-boo views out to that wooded area because the woods surround it. It’s not just on one side like the ocean of the Dana Point house.” The design won the 2018 American Institute of Architects, Orange County Chapter Design Award.

“From my perspective, the most important thing we do is create better spaces for people to occupy



and lead better lives through these spaces,” Lasater says. “We deserve great architectural design—and people should expect it. And the more we can help people know what good architecture is, the more they’re going to expect it and the more they’re going to want it.”

Technology has made it easier for Lasater and his colleagues. “It’s difficult to take a building and put it on paper and have anybody understand it. That’s because



visualizing a building in three-dimensional space is difficult—it takes years to master,” he says. “So now we can create 3-D environments that you can actually walk through and participate in.

“When my client sees that, it suddenly goes from, ‘I’m not sure I get it’ to ‘Oh my, now I see.’ It becomes a game changer about how the client understands what I’m doing. Across the spectrum of the work we’ve done, the one unifying idea is that all of these buildings—whether it’s a home, a clothing retailer, an art gallery, or a restaurant—are places where we can have intimate experiences with people and with the building itself—and that the building will become a vehicle for making your life better.”

Among Lasater’s favorite buildings is The Jonas Salk Institute in La Jolla, designed by Louis Kahn.

“It’s a beautiful and pure expression of poured concrete and wood brought together in a very reverential way. It’s one of the most spiritually beautiful buildings I’ve ever seen. And it’s not a spiritual place at all. It’s a place where scientists work. Louis Kahn realized the best way to give a scientist a place to work is to create something that moves the soul.”

One of Lasater’s favorites that he personally designed is the Peter Blake Gallery in Laguna Beach. “It’s white stucco and white drywall. There are no special materials, no fancy tricks, nothing you can point to that makes it a great building.”

Instead, “it is a collection of thoughtfully proportioned spaces, carefully arranged; windows and skylights; and volumes that create intimate opportunities to be with the art that Peter displays.” —
By Eve Gumpel, California Business Journal

Copyright © 2019 California Business Journal. All Rights Reserved.